

# A Quick Guide to Safe Food Handling

## When You Prepare Food

- Wash hands in hot soapy water *before* preparing food and *after* using the bathroom, changing diapers and handling pets.
- Bacteria can live in kitchen towels, sponges and cloths. Wash them often. Replace sponges every few weeks.
- Keep raw meat, poultry and fish and their juices away from other food. For instance, wash your hands, cutting board and knife with hot soapy water after cutting up the chicken and before dicing salad ingredients.
- Thaw food in the microwave or refrigerator, NOT on the kitchen counter. The danger? Bacteria can grow in the outer layers of the food before the inside thaws. Marinate in the refrigerator too.

## When You Serve Food

- **Never leave perishable food out of the refrigerator over 2 hours!** Bacteria that can cause food poisoning grow quickly at warm temperatures.
- Party time? Keep cold party food on ice or serve it throughout the gathering from platters from the refrigerator.

Likewise, divide hot party food into smaller serving platters. Keep platters refrigerated until time to warm them up for serving.

## Power's Out

### Your Freezer

- Without power, a full upright or chest freezer will keep everything frozen for about 2 days. A half-full freezer will keep food frozen 1 day.
- If power will be coming back on fairly soon, you can make the food last longer by keeping the door shut as much as possible.

- If power will be off for an extended period, take food to friends' freezers, locate a commercial freezer or use dry ice.

### Your Refrigerator — Freezer Combination

- Without power, the refrigerator section will keep food cool 4-6 hours depending on the kitchen temperature.
- A full, well-functioning freezer unit should keep food frozen for 2 days. A half-full freezer unit should keep things frozen about 1 day.
- Block ice can keep food on the refrigerator shelves cooler. Dry ice can be added to the freezer unit. You can't touch dry ice and you shouldn't breathe the fumes, so follow handling directions carefully.

### Thawed Food

- Food still containing ice crystals or that feels refrigerator-cold can be refrozen. Discard any thawed food that has risen to room temperature and remained there 2 hours or more. Immediately discard anything with a strange color or odor.

## Is It Food Poisoning?

- If you or a family member develop nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever or cramps, you could have food poisoning. Unfortunately, it's not always easy to tell, since depending on the illness, symptoms can appear anywhere from 30 minutes to 2 weeks. Most often, though, people get sick within 4 to 48 hours after eating bad food.
- In more serious cases, food poisoning victims may have nervous system problems like paralysis, double vision or trouble swallowing or breathing.
- If symptoms are severe or the victim is very young, old, pregnant or already ill, call a doctor or go to the hospital right away.

*Adapted from USDA*



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**FOOD PROGRAM**  
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